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ABSTRACT

This report examines the unique aspects of homelessness among youth ages 16 to 21. Section I reviews existing literature and data on the size, characteristics, and needs of homeless youth. Section II summarizes New York State's current efforts on their behalf. Section III analyzes obstacles to serving this population. Section IV outlines an action plan for New York State to improve its services. Although New York State has been a leader in recognizing the needs of runaway and homeless youth, the scope and methods of the present service delivery system fail to meet the magnitude and nature of the crisis. Probably the greatest deficiency is the lack of services available to older homeless youth as compared to those for youth and children under 16. Other gaps and barriers include the unavailability of transitional services which address long-term rather than emergency needs; inadequate coordination of services such as education, health care, and housing; and limitations of current funding sources. The recommendations address five areas: (1) coordination between state agencies; (2) implementation of a formal mechanism to ensure coordinated planning and service delivery at the local level; (3) development of transitional services; (4) improved preparation for independent living of youth in residential child care; and (5) evaluation and research in developing and improving the service delivery systems. (ETS)

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

A Report of the Homeless Youth Steering Committee

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

A Report of the Homeless Youth Steering Committee

New York State Council on Children and Families

October 1984

Michael J. Del Giudice
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION		
	Background and Approach	1
	Parameters of the Committee's Work	2
	Organization of the Report	2
SECTION I	DESCRIPTION OF THE HOMELESS YOUTH POPULATION AND ITS NEEDS	4
	Size of Population	4
	Characteristics of the Population	5
	Service Needs	7
SECTION II	OVERVIEW OF LEGISLATION AND CURRENT EFFORTS TO SERVE HOMELESS YOUTH IN NEW YORK STATE	8
	Legislation	8
	State Initiatives and Demonstrations for Homeless Youth	9
	Summary	11
SECTION III	GAPS AND BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVELY SERVING HOMELESS YOUTH	12
	Lack of Services for Homeless Youth	12
	Unavailability of Transitional Services	12
	Inadequate Coordination of Services	13
	Insufficient Case Coordination	14
	Limitations of Current Funding Sources to Serve Homeless Youth	14
	Inadequate Discharge Planning and Aftercare Services within the Residential Child Care System	16
	Lack of Adequate Housing	17
	Absence of an Emancipation Status for Youth	17

	Insufficient Employment Opportunities	18
	Inaccessibility of Educational Services	19
	Summary	19
SECTION IV	RECOMMENDATIONS	20
	Maximize Existing Resources	21
	Ensure Local Coordination	26
	Develop Transitional Services	27
	Decrease the Incidence of Homelessness Among Youth Leaving Residential Care	31
	Expand Evaluation and Research Efforts	32
REFERENCES		34

INTRODUCTION

The size of the homeless youth population in New York State, and across the country, is reaching critical proportions. Until recently, little was known about the homeless youth population. While definitive answers regarding their numbers and problems are not yet available, attention has begun to be focused on this population in response to their growing numbers and the concern that without effective intervention these youth will eventually swell the numbers of homeless adults in New York State.

Certain general problems confronted by the homeless youth population are clear. First, homeless youth have multiple needs requiring a broad and integrated array of services. Second, although they have certain problems in common with all homeless persons, they also experience special problems directly related to their developmental needs and to their ambiguous legal status as neither children nor adults. Third, the few programs currently serving homeless youth tend to focus on the immediate crisis of homelessness and not on the longer term need of these youth for self-sufficiency.

It is in response to these general problems, as well as the many specific ones faced by homeless youth, that this report has been prepared. The report's recommendations and implementation steps, taken as a whole, attempt to construct a comprehensive approach for New York State that meets the special needs of homeless youth and helps to foster their ability to function as independent adults.

Background and Approach

The following report on homeless youth is part of a larger effort by New York State to address the staggering problems faced by all homeless persons. In February 1983, Governor Cuomo convened the Governor's Task Force on the Homeless, an interagency body whose purpose is to improve the state's response to the shelter and service needs of the homeless population. The Task Force provides a forum for identifying the problems surrounding homelessness, discussing alternative solutions, and proposing policy recommendations.

The Task Force directed the Council on Children and Families to convene a Steering Committee to examine the unique aspects of homelessness among youth. The Homeless Youth Steering Committee was convened in April 1984 and, over the course of four months, has met regularly to analyze the needs of the homeless youth population and to formulate a course of action for New York State.

The membership of the Homeless Youth Steering Committee has brought an exceptional breadth of knowledge and experience to the task. The group is composed of representatives from state agencies, advocacy organizations concerned with the homeless, and provider agencies currently serving homeless youth.

The efforts of the Steering Committee were supported by a work team composed of staff from the following New York State agencies: Council on Children and Families, Division for Youth, Department of Social Services, and

Office of Mental Health. The work team was responsible for the preparation of background materials to facilitate the Committee's deliberations and for the drafting of the Committee's report and recommendations.

As part of its approach, the work team surveyed a number of programs currently serving runaway and homeless youth. Additionally, interviews were conducted with representatives from pertinent state agencies. The cooperation of all of these individuals and organizations is worthy of special acknowledgement.

Parameters of the Committee's Work

There are several points that should be made about the following material. First, for the purpose of the report, homeless youth are defined as youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who are living apart from their families. Although youth as young as eight or nine can be found living alone on the streets, children's services can more easily respond to the needs for protection and nurturance of the very young abandoned child than to older homeless youth. Another significant problem is the number of homeless families with children. These families have special problems requiring a comprehensive array of services designed to meet the needs of the parent(s), the child(ren), and the family unit as a whole. However, this analysis is limited to the older homeless youth away from their families, youth who in many ways face greater barriers to services.

Second, the Steering Committee recognized that the problems of homeless youth are rooted in larger societal problems, such as inadequate housing, poverty and unemployment. The solution to these problems is well beyond the scope of this report. Therefore, the Steering Committee recommendations should be viewed as part of a broader strategy for addressing the causes and consequences of homelessness in New York State.

Third, this paper, by necessity, discusses homeless youth in the aggregate. Nevertheless, it is very important to recognize that the general statistics represent many individual young lives, each with unique circumstances. Therefore, in the actual service setting, it is the individual's characteristics and background that should be addressed, not a "prototypical" homeless youth.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of this paper consists of four sections which reflect the Steering Committee's approach. Section I summarizes a review of existing literature and data on the size, characteristics, and needs of the homeless youth population. The second section of the paper summarizes New York State's current efforts on behalf of homeless youth. Section III provides an analysis of gaps and barriers to serving the population, gaps that are created by current regulation, legislation, practice, and funding mechanisms.

Section IV of this paper forms the basis of an action plan for New York State to improve services for homeless youth. Five major recommendations are supported by a series of implementation steps which detail specific activities that should be taken and identify responsibility for carrying out the recommended actions.

While the paper and its recommendations focus on problems and deficits of homeless youth, it is important to keep in mind that youth who are able to survive on the streets have assets. Many of these young people exhibit an ingenuity, determination and courage that is often the only reason they do survive. It is essential that these strengths be recognized and built upon.

SECTION I. DESCRIPTION OF THE HOMELESS YOUTH POPULATION AND ITS NEEDS

Although homeless youth have received significant media attention and many youth advocates and state and local government officials are actively concerned with this population, very little statistical data exist on its size and characteristics. Indeed, the data that are available must be treated with caution since they are neither comprehensive nor comparable.

Most of the information on homeless youth that is available comes from the administrative records of programs that provide shelter and other services to this population. Unfortunately, these records are not a comprehensive count of the number of youth in these circumstances; some youth may not seek assistance from such sources while others may seek assistance from multiple sources.

It also is difficult to compare the data that are found in administrative records since there is no uniformly accepted definition of "homeless". Much of the available statistics label all youth who seek shelter and other services as "runaways", since the largest proportion of available data was collected by runaway programs. However, many of the youth who are included in this group have no home to return to, have long-term shelter needs, and are, in fact, homeless.

Other often-used terms that encompass but do not adequately describe homeless youth are "push outs" and "throwaways". A large percentage of the youth who seek shelter have been pushed or thrown out of their homes by their parents or guardians and are not able or willing to return. However, some of these youth are able and do reconcile with their parents or guardians, and should not be considered homeless. Yet another term used in the literature, which probably more accurately describes the population, is "nonreturners" - runaway youth who do not return home. Youth described by this term need long-term shelter and other services, and are homeless, but the term implies that they have a home to return to, which is not the case for all homeless youth. Thus, the data presented here, while reflective of the best information available, do not provide the systematic nor comparable data base required.

Quantitative Overview

Although it is difficult to obtain comprehensive information on homeless youth for the reasons discussed above, numerous estimates of the size and characteristics of this population do exist.

Size of the Population

- A recent Congressional report estimates that there are between 225,000 and 500,000 homeless youth in the United States (16).
- The New York State Division for Youth (DFY) estimates that there are 20,000 homeless youth in New York State (12).
- In 1983, Runaway and Homeless Youth programs, supported in part by DFY, which limits its programs to only serving youth under 18, housed over 11,000 youth and provided crisis services to another 11,000 youth.

About 60 percent (6,500) of those housed were homeless. The number of runaway and homeless youth requesting services has increased each year since the program was established in 1979 (9).

- The homeless youth problem in New York City is particularly acute. Approximately 85 percent of the state's homeless youth served by DFY, or 5,560 individuals under 18, sought services in New York City in 1983 and one large non-DFY funded program served an estimated 10,000 homeless youth during that same period (3).

Characteristics of the Population

- The homeless youth population is nearly evenly divided between males and females. In 1983, 55 percent of the youth served by the DFY Runaway and Homeless Youth programs were male (9). This is considerably higher than the 43 percent figure for males found in a national survey conducted in 1976 (11).

- While the average age of homeless males is 17, the age average for homeless females is 15 (16).

- The ethnicity of the homeless youth population generally reflects the ethnic distribution of the area in which they are served (13). Programs in New York City serve a high percentage of black and Hispanic youth, while those in the balance of the state serve a predominantly white population (1,2,3,8,9).

- Most homeless youth seek services in the community in which they have been living. In 1976, a national survey found that only 20 percent of the youth served in runaway and homeless youth programs were from communities that were more than 50 miles away from the program where they sought assistance (11). In New York City, 88 percent of the males and 92 percent of the females served in runaway and homeless youth programs were born in New York City (13).

- In New York State, homeless youth often try a variety of different living arrangements before seeking shelter assistance. A survey conducted in New York City in 1983 found that only 40 percent of these youth had come to the programs directly from family or other relatives (10).

- Most homeless youth want to work. A study of homeless youth in the New York City municipal shelter system found that the majority of the youth sampled (ages 18-23) have had employment experience and stated that stable housing and employment were currently their main objectives. However, 68 percent have been unable to maintain a job for six months (10).

- In 1976, a national survey found that runaway and homeless youth come in equal numbers from white collar and blue collar homes (11).

- A large number of homeless youth have previously been in foster care. A national survey, conducted in 1980, found that 20 to 35 percent of homeless youth had been in foster care prior to requesting services (16). Other studies, including one that interviewed New York City shelter users, have found that as many as 50 percent of the youth seeking shelter had a history of foster care placement (13).

- A 1984 study of shelter users found that 58 percent of the youth interviewed had come from the foster care, mental health, or criminal justice systems (10).

- A program in Nassau County reported that 75 percent of the homeless youth in its programs were high school dropouts (8). A similar study of homeless youth in the New York City municipal shelter system found that, of the youth sampled, 78 percent failed to complete high school (10).

- A recent study of runaway and homeless youth in New York City found that 70 percent of the youth sampled exhibited some symptoms of psychiatric disorder (e.g., depression, suicidal behavior, antisocial behavior). No fewer than 33 percent of the females and 15 percent of the males had attempted suicide. An additional 28 percent of the females and 22 percent of the males reported that they had contemplated suicide (13).

- Seventy percent of the youth surveyed in a 1983 study of runaway and homeless youth reported that they used drugs. Thirty percent admitted to using three or more different types of drugs, 17 percent admitted to using two drugs, and 23 percent admitted they used one drug only (13).

- A higher percentage of homeless youth have had legal difficulties than in the general youth population. A 1976 study found that 24 percent of runaway and homeless youth had at least one incident with the law leading to arrest, compared with only eight percent of a control group (11). A similar study in New York City found that 37 percent of the males and 19 percent of the females had been arrested previously (12).

- A study of homeless youth in Albany County found that 27 percent of homeless youth under 18, and 41 percent of homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 21 were involved with the legal system during the last six months (4). A program in Nassau County reported that during the three years between 1980 and 1983, 63 percent of the homeless youth served had prior family court involvement and 50 percent had prior criminal court involvement (8). A study of youth using runaway and homeless youth programs in New York City found that 37 percent of the males and 19 percent of the females had been charged with at least one criminal offense (13).

- A higher proportion of homeless youth are sexually active than in the youth population in general. One survey found that nearly 75 percent of these youth had engaged in sexual intercourse and that one-third of the females had been pregnant at least once (13).

- A large percentage of homeless youth have been victims of abuse and neglect. A 1978 national survey of runaway youth who did not return home found that 84 percent had been hit by their parents, fifty-eight percent had been beaten at least once a month, and 26 percent had been beaten every day (5). Of those that had been hit by their parents, 69 percent reported that a mark or scar had resulted from the violence (5).

- While not as prevalent as physical abuse, sexual abuse also causes a number of youth to leave home (16).

- A number of studies have cited the stress caused by parental alcoholism as a reason for many youth to leave home (13, 16).

- According to a 1979 study, nearly 55 percent of the parents of adjudicated runaway youth who had been remanded to the Division for Youth stated that they were unwilling or unable to care for their runaway children. The report concluded that 64 percent of the runaways would need placements in surrogate homes because conditions in their family households were considered to be "dangerous" to their physical or emotional well-being (7).

- A study conducted in 1983 in New York City found that family conflict was the single largest factor precipitating entry into the shelter system, accounting for 35 percent of the cases. Seventy-seven percent of the youth said that they did not want to go home, usually because they felt they could not overcome family conflict (10).

Service Needs

- Homeless youth have a diverse set of needs. A 1978 survey of runaway youth who did not return home identified 20 services that might be needed, including such diverse services as shelter, medical care, and advocacy services (5).

- In 1983, 52 percent of the homeless youth using the New York City shelter system stated that securing employment was their primary goal. Although half of these youth had received some formal occupational training, they required job readiness training and other supportive services before they could secure and maintain employment (10).

- A 1978 national study of the service needs of runaways found that the most pressing need for 73 percent of the youth was long-term housing (5).

- In 1983, a study of homeless youth in Nassau County identified the following service needs:

  a) job counseling, skills training, and placement that attempts to match youth with appropriate and beneficial jobs;

  b) independent living services and housing resources;

  c) support and guidance from a variety of people that is provided outside the more traditional social work setting (e.g., mentors or post-institutionalized youth), since homeless youth are often unwilling clients who perceive themselves as "over social worked";

  d) specialized counseling, advocacy, and training for youth who have poor English skills;

  e) case management which links youth to existing physical health, family support, and legal assistance services; and

  f) services that encourage the development of more positive self-perceptions, confidence, and peer relationships (8).

SECTION II. OVERVIEW OF LEGISLATION AND CURRENT EFFORTS TO SERVE HOMELESS YOUTH IN NEW YORK STATE

New York State has been a leader in recognizing the needs of runaway and homeless youth. Although the scope and methods of the present service delivery system are inadequate to meet the magnitude and nature of the homeless youth crisis, a framework for developing a comprehensive response exists and can be built upon. The following describes the legislation that provides the structure for New York State's service delivery system for homeless youth. In addition, this section highlights selected initiatives and demonstration projects that address the needs of homeless youth.

In general, the information used to develop this section was obtained through two methods: 1) interviews with various state agency representatives and homeless youth service providers; and 2) reviews of legislation, legislative testimony, runaway and homeless youth plans and program proposals, and other available literature on this population.

While the following analysis focuses primarily on the state's role in serving this population, it is essential to recognize the central role of the private sector. Historically, services to the homeless have been associated with church groups and grass roots organizations. Soup kitchens, missions, and shelters sponsored by inner city churches or religious organizations have expanded in size as well as in the scope of the services they provide. In addition, many youth shelters evolved from the crash pads and hot-lines of the 1960's developed by a variety of community-based organizations. These grass roots organizations continue to rely on their communities for volunteers and additional funding. Foundations and other private funding sources provide a portion of the budget of the runaway and homeless youth service network. However, private funding is limited and cannot be relied on as a sole source of support.

Legislation

Although the problems of homeless youth have been known and written about for years, it was not until the late 1970's that government began to establish policies directed at the special needs of this population. Legislation enacted by both the federal government and New York State has led to the development of services and networks that have made significant inroads toward meeting the needs of this population.

- In October 1977, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, was reauthorized. The reauthorization bill amended Title III (Runaway Youth Act) to include homeless youth, renaming it the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. This act funds ten programs in New York State which provide crisis shelter, 24-hour crisis intervention and other necessary services. A ten percent match by the grantee is required.

- In 1978, the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) was enacted. This act was established to provide services to runaway and homeless youth and contains a planning mechanism designed to improve the coordination of local services to the target population. It requires the submission of a plan for the coordination of all available county

resources, including services available through the county youth bureau, local departments of social services and mental health, local boards of education, drug and alcohol programs, and organizations with past experience in dealing with runaway and homeless youth. The county must also designate a Runaway and Homeless Youth Services Coordinator to be accountable for and assist with service coordination efforts. The $1.78 million allocated through this act provides an enriched funding source of 75 percent state dollars the first two years of funding and a 60 percent state share each subsequent year. It should be noted that most of the programs receiving federal runaway and homeless youth funds are also receiving funding under the state RHYA. Currently, the RHYA funds eleven youth bureaus that, in turn, support 35 runaway and homeless youth programs. Funded programs can provide crisis shelter, counseling and other services for youth up to age 18.

- On April 25, 1983, Governor Cuomo signed into law the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP), Chapter 61 of the Laws of 1983, establishing a special fund under the administration of New York State Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide state financial assistance to construct or rehabilitate housing for the homeless and, where necessary and appropriate, to provide support services. An allocation of $12.3 million was appropriated during fiscal year 1983-84. To date, six of the programs which serve youth have received capital construction money through HHAP.

State Initiatives and Demonstrations for Homeless Youth

- The Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council was established by the Division for Youth to oversee and advise on the implementation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. The Advisory Council is composed of providers, advocates, youth bureaus, and state agency representatives from the Division for Youth, Council on Children and Families, and Department of Social Services. It seeks to ensure coordination of services for runaway and homeless youth on both a state and community level.

- The Division for Youth has provided demonstration funds through the Community-Based Organizations (CBO) Urban Home Initiative to establish two exemplary models for serving older homeless youth. One is a group home that assists youth returning from DFY placements to readjust to the community by preparing them to become self-sufficient. The second program assists youth in the development of independent living skills. It also sponsors a unique program which involves clients in the rehabilitation of buildings to become low-cost permanent housing.

- In November of 1982, the Department of Social Services promulgated Young Adult Shelter Regulations. These regulations establish operating requirements for programs providing temporary residential care and support services for homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 21. The regulations delineate guidelines for the provision of food, shelter, and other services that this population needs in order to become self-sufficient and live independently. The Young Adult Shelter regulations serve as the framework for the development of programs for older homeless youth.

- The Department of Social Services is responsible for the implementation of the Child Welfare Reform Act (CWRA), which has as its mandate the reduction of the need and duration of the placement of youth in residential child care. Until recently, CWRA-funded preventive services have focused primarily on young children and their families. Due to the rising average age of youth entering placement, and also to the disproportionate number of homeless youth who had been in foster care, DSS has instituted a number of projects to demonstrate the benefits of using CWRA funding for preventive services for adolescents. The Court Related Youth Preventive Services Project (CRYPS) is designed to provide preventive services to court involved adolescents at risk of placement. The Adolescent Family Foster Care Project seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of specialized foster care placement for adolescents as an alternative to costly institutional placements. Finally, the Program Assessment for Independent Living Project, which is funded by a grant from the Division of Criminal Justice Services, is a project designed to better prepare youth in foster care for independent living. While these projects are not exclusively targeted to homeless youth, they may all be viewed as part of a strategy for preventing homelessness.

- The Department of Social Services has recently received a federal grant for an employment and independent living demonstration project targeted at runaway, homeless and foster care youth. Project JIFY (Jobs, Independence for Youth) is a cooperative venture between six governmental agencies, voluntary agencies and private business. It is anticipated that 300 youth will participate in this program which will provide self-help and job finding groups.

- The Department of Labor administers the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Title II of this act emphasizes the development of training programs for disadvantaged youth. Service Delivery Areas (SDA) have the primary responsibility for the planning and implementation of services under this act, including decisions regarding special training activities. Homeless youth may be targeted by the SDA as a special population. In order to remove barriers to participation in a training program, JTPA funding can be used for those who cannot afford them, to subsidize support services which are necessary to enable an individual to participate in such training. Supportive services may include transportation, health care, needs based payments, temporary shelters, financial counseling and other reasonable expenses for participation in the training program. Legislation limits the percentage of JTPA funds which may be used for supportive services by a service delivery area.

- The Department of Labor is implementing the Governor's $5 million youth employment initiative. The State Youth Employment Program (SYEP) represents 40 percent of the funds of the initiative and is designed for programs for out-of-school youth. It identifies homeless youth as among those groups to be targeted for services.

- The Office of Mental Health has received funding to create a mobile mental health team that would provide diagnostic and treatment services for homeless youth served by the various shelters and homeless youth programs in New York City.

- The Division of Community Health and Epidemiology of the Department of Health is administering a supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for the Elderly, Homeless and Indigent that is modeled after the WIC Program. Homeless youth are eligible for services through this program.

- The Division of Housing and Community Renewal has established a nonprofit corporation to act as a guarantor on bank loans made to nonprofit corporations developing housing for the homeless.

Summary

This section has highlighted a number of efforts on the part of New York State to serve homeless youth. These efforts have produced a number of useful program models and have provided excellent services to those young people reached by the limited number of demonstration sites. Clearly, each of these initiatives represents an important step. Unfortunately, even in combination these initiatives remain insufficient for meeting the needs of homeless youth.

SECTION III. GAPS AND BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVELY SERVING HOMELESS YOUTH

A strong commitment to alleviating the crisis of homeless youth exists at all levels of government as well as among numerous community groups, service providers, and advocates. Yet, the ability of these groups to respond effectively is limited by gaps and barriers in the current service system, many of which are due to a lack of a comprehensive policy framework focused specifically on homeless youth. The following is a description of the major gaps and barriers to the provision of adequate and appropriate services.

A. Lack of Services for Older Homeless Youth

Probably the greatest deficiency in the present system for serving homeless youth is the lack of services designed to meet the needs of older homeless youth (youth 16-21 years of age). The human service system is primarily divided between children's services and adult services. Older homeless youth share a common dilemma with other 16 to 21 year old youth seeking services, in that their developmental and service needs straddle the children and adult systems. The state and federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Acts currently provide funding for the majority of runaway and homeless youth programs in New York State. However, both of these acts restrict programs from serving youth over 18 years of age. Further, the program models reflect the supervision and counseling needs of younger adolescents, whom the programs have typically served.

While a few programs, through other sources of funding, have been able to serve older homeless youth, many homeless youth are forced into the adult service system which is also not designed to adequately meet their needs. The adult service system provides shelter, job placement, and case management services, but it is not designed to offer homeless youth the support, guidance, and training needed to gain self-sufficiency and live independently.

B. Unavailability of Transitional Services

Existing services for homeless youth are provided on an emergency or short-term basis and, therefore, fail to address the long-term service needs of homeless youth. The current system is an extension of the service system designed to reunite runaway youth with their families or to respond to some other temporary family disruption. Therefore, state and federal runaway and homeless youth funds, Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children (EAF), and other sources of funding limit shelter care to crisis periods. Further, the services associated with these programs are directed at family reunification.

While runaway programs offer effective and appropriate services for runaway youth and their families, these programs are not designed to meet the long-term needs of homeless youth. Homeless youth require services designed to help them make the transition to independent living. Unlike runaway youth, homeless youth have no home or family to which to return. Many lack basic skills (e.g., money management, homemaking), educational or vocational training, or a supportive environment within which to achieve the skills necessary to become self-sufficient.

In November of 1982, DSS promulgated Young Adult Shelter Regulations. The product of much positive and ongoing dialogue with other state agencies, advocates, and runaway and homeless youth service providers, these regulations represented a major breakthrough in the recognition of the age-specific developmental needs of the homeless youth population. The Young Adult Shelter Regulations provide one framework for the development of transitional programs. However, few programs are operating under these regulations because no funding is available to support the development of this program model.

C. Inadequate Coordination of Services

The diverse needs of homeless youth require a comprehensive service approach. Because homeless youth need housing, education, vocational training, health care, mental health services, and substance abuse and alcohol services it is important to involve many service delivery systems in their care. This is difficult because relevant service delivery systems operate independently and in response to different mandates. Too often, the absence of state level coordination leads to fragmentation of service delivery at the local level.

Many of the services needed by homeless youth do not have to be provided by homeless youth programs, but it is important that they are available and accessible in the community. In fact, many of these services are currently available within most communities. However, the lack of coordination across local service systems results in limited accessibility to education, vocational training and other necessary services. A greater emphasis on removing barriers to existing services provided through various community resources allows for a more cost-effective use of funds, rather than recreating the same array of services.

The lack of coordination creates an additional problem: an inability to identify gaps in services. While populations such as homeless youth have multiple needs that cross agency jurisdictions, planning is typically system-specific. Therefore, if an agency does not identify homeless youth as a priority population, and fails to include them in their agency plan, service gaps will arise. The inability to identify these gaps through a cross-agency planning process has led to specific problems. The lack of a full range of mental health services, including diagnostic services, crisis intervention and day treatment programs for adolescents, has been consistently noted. Similarly, drug and alcohol abuse are frequently cited as major problems for homeless youth; however, drug and alcohol abuse services appropriate for the adolescent population are not readily available.

Serving older homeless youth is further complicated by the unique needs of specific subgroups which seek services. The homeless youth population is made up of various subpopulations, including young mothers with children, physically and developmentally disabled youth, non-English speaking youth, sexually exploited youth, and gay and lesbian youth. Each of these groups has special needs and requires a sensitivity to and awareness of these needs.

Issues inhibiting a coordinated, comprehensive service response exist at all levels of policy development, program planning and implementation. However, current coordination mechanisms for this population are limited to those outlined in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. While a positive model with strong potential for expansion, RHYA's impact is limited to those counties receiving RHYA funds.

D. Insufficient Case Coordination

Inadequate coordination is also an issue on a case-specific basis. Effectively serving homeless youth requires a coordinated and integrated approach. Not only is an array of services necessary, but these services must be provided in a complementary fashion. Many youth lack the ability to translate the problems they are experiencing into requests for specific services. This impedes the even more difficult task of identifying and accessing the multiple community agencies which, together, could form the necessary support system for the youth. Thus, while services may be available in the community, without effective case coordination for individual youth, there is no assurance that homeless youth will be able to access the right configuration of services.

E. Limitations of Current Funding Sources to Serve Homeless Youth

In New York State, there are a number of legislatively established funding sources for residential programs for runaway and homeless youth. State monies available through the New York State Division for Youth include the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), the Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Program (YDDP), and the Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP). Funds are available from the Department of Social Services via the Home Relief program (HR) and the Emergency Assistance for Needy Families with Children Program (EAF). Programs in different communities have had varying degrees of success in sustaining services with any one or a combination of these funds. The problems or limitations associated with each of these existing funding sources are described below.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

The New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, while an essential component to an overall strategy, cannot presently support a transitional living model. These funds only allow for crisis shelter and short-term services to youth under the age of 18. Additionally, the appropriation currently available is fully committed, supporting programming in only 11 counties across the state.

Home Relief/Income Maintenance

The HR program is a state income maintenance program designed to expand availability of cash assistance to persons not eligible for the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. In contrast to AFDC, households of one and households without dependent children are eligible under the HR program.

The fact that a youth over 16 years old is eligible to receive Home Relief does not mean that he or she will receive Home Relief. The social

services district may determine that the child has no need for public assistance because the parent's home is an available resource. The caseworker is not required to conduct an in-person assessment with the parent. Many advocates are therefore concerned that this determination of parental availability does not take into consideration long histories of the inability of the parent and child to resolve conflicts that make the home an unsuitable place for the youth to live.

Further, the determination and redetermination process for eligibility is so cumbersome that youth are discouraged from applying. An even greater deterrent is the fact that the legal process requires a youth to participate in a proceeding in family court against his/her parents. These barriers make it difficult for a homeless youth to obtain this source of support.

Even for those homeless youth who are able to receive HR, cash assistance is limited to supporting food and shelter needs. The HR program does not provide funding for services beyond these basic needs.

Emergency Assistance to Needy Families with Children

EAF is part of the federal Social Security program. EAF funds services for families with children requiring emergency assistance to deal with crisis situations. Services provided are those services necessary to cope with the emergency situation, including information and referral, counseling, and shelter.

The program provides 50 percent federal reimbursement, with New York State providing 25 percent and localities providing the remaining 25 percent. Eligibility requirements include that 1) the child reside (or, has within the past six months resided) with a parent or guardian; 2) is without resources to care for him/herself; and 3) such assistance is necessary to avoid destitution. Services may be authorized only for one period of 30 consecutive days in any twelve consecutive months. Each of these restrictions makes it difficult for a homeless youth to obtain EAF. In those instances when a youth is eligible, EAF funds allow for crisis intervention services only, and do not support longer term transitional needs.

Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention and Special Delinquency Prevention Program

Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention funds (YDDP) are considered the mainstay of youth bureau funding. Counties engaged in comprehensive planning receive an annual allocation of $5.50 per youth residing in the county, with a $1 per youth per year add-on available for special youth initiatives. Programs funded by these monies reflect an extremely broad definition of delinquency prevention.

The Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP) provides up to 100 percent state reimbursement for community-based services that are specifically designed to divert high-risk youth from delinquent behavior. While the majority of SDPP funds are distributed through youth bureaus, a portion of the funds is allocated directly from DFY to community organizations.

While YDDP and SDPP funds are flexible and have provided an easily utilized funding source, the major drawback of the use of both funding sources is the limited availability of dollars. Most youth bureaus have fully committed their YDDP and SDPP allocations and redistributing these funds would require the defunding of other programs in the community. Currently, policy concerning SDPP funds provides an additional barrier to the use of these dollars for homeless youth programs. Except in specific situations, eligibility for SDPP grants is limited to "grass roots" organizations. While this policy was designed to promote small community-based efforts and groups, it has inadvertantly excluded public service organizations, some of which have historically been involved in housing and feeding the homeless.

F. Inadequate Discharge Planning and Aftercare Services within the Residential Child Care System

As indicated in the review of data, a significant portion of homeless youth were formerly in the state's residential child care system. These youth have not been successfully reintegrated into their families or communities, or have no families to which they can return. One contributing factor has been that young people are entering the foster care system at an older age, and are frequently released to their own responsibility upon discharge. At the end of 1983, in DSS foster care, over 57 percent of the youth in placement had a goal of independent living in their case records.

Even those youth who leave residential care to return to their families may find themselves on their own within a short time because problems in the home which triggered the original placement have not been resolved. Many advocates identify the lack of effective aftercare and discharge planning as a causal factor for a significant percentage of the homeless youth population.

The lack of clear reimbursement for aftercare is often identified as a barrier. The DSS Consolidated Services Plan defines aftercare as an allowable foster care service. Costs for aftercare services are included in the Department's reimbursement rates for foster care agencies. However, agencies receive reimbursement only when the child is in residence. Therefore, the cost for services provided after the child leaves care are assumed by DSS to have been paid in advance. Some child care agencies argue that, in reality, they are not reimbursed for the aftercare services they provide; others simply do not provide aftercare.

In October 1980, DSS promulgated regulations enabling local districts and authorized foster care agencies to develop Supervised Independent Living Programs. These programs are designed to assist youth who are going to be discharged to their own responsibility between the ages of 18 and 21. Although this program has been authorized for over three years and the formal implementing directive (82 ADM-71) has been in place for one and a half years, the development of these programs has been extremely limited.

The limited implementation of the Supervised Independent Living Program may be due, in part, to the fiscal and programmatic restrictions on the program. Department regulations define Supervised Independent Living as a component of group foster care programs in order to maintain compliance with federal regulations. Due to the definition of the program as a foster care

program, the youth must remain in the community where the institution is located. The regulations do not allow for the institution to contract with an agency in the youth's home community. Therefore, the program provides limited support in aiding the youth's reintegration into his/her home community.

G. Lack of Adequate Housing

The lack of adequate housing is another major barrier to helping young adults make a permanent transition from the ranks of the homeless. Given sufficient permanent housing arrangements, service providers could focus on the array of support services needed to help the client live independently. However, programs designed to equip young people with the skills to succeed in a permanent living arrangement are often unable to find adequate, affordable housing for the youth. Vacancy rates are often so low - just over two percent in New York City - that finding housing is a major task even for those with sufficient income.

The experience of the Barnabas program (a homeless youth program in Syracuse), reflected in the quotation below, is characteristic of service providers in other urban centers:

> The demand for decent, vermin-free, securable rooms for rent or small apartments is so high that the reputable prospective landlord can pick and choose among potential tenants. An unemployed or under-employed youth who is too young to sign a lease, and who has no references nor money for a room deposit, is considered to be a poor risk, by all save the most disreputable, or the most charitable landlords and superintendents. . . . Finally, the facility with which youths are referred to unscrupulous landlords by some service providers, the speed with which others provide emergency financial assistance (E.F.A.) vouchers to those same vultures, and the lack of accountability which the local Department of Social Services demands of potential landlords, might be characterized as a conspiracy of stupidity. It results in a large number of young people moved into exploitive living arrangements and dilapidated uninhabitable housing. (1)

H. Absence of an Emancipation Status for Youth

The ambiguity inherent in the legal status of an adolescent or young adult who is living independently has emerged as an issue for the homeless youth population. Questionable legal status, particularly acute for the 16 to 18 year old, makes it impossible for homeless youth to establish permanent residence, to formulate adequate educational plans, to obtain their own personal records, and to receive medical or mental health services. For example, fully 50 percent of runaway and homeless youth arriving at shelters require immediate medical attention, not obtainable by youth under 18 without parental permission except in life and death situations.

In New York State there are no consistent guidelines that can be used for determining when a child is emancipated. The two major standards for emancipation found either in regulation or in law in New York State are limited to the determination of eligibility for educational financial aid and public assistance. In one instance, to determine the amount of

financial aid for a graduate or undergraduate student, Education Law Section 663(3) defines an emancipated student as:

1. An applicant who has reached his thirty-fifth birthday..., or,
2. an applicant who is an undergraduate student who has reached his twenty-second birthday..., and,
3. has not resided with his parents for more than two consecutive weeks...; and,
4. during the parents' next taxable year preceding the semester,...such student has not been claimed as a dependent by either parent for purposes of making either federal or state income tax.

In regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, to be used to determine the eligibility of minors to receive public assistance, an emancipated minor has been defined as:

> a person over 16 years of age who has completed his compulsory education, who is living separate and apart from his family and is not in receipt of, or in need of, foster care.

Legal decisions over the past ten years have created a confusing set of case law concerning the liability of parent and child when the child lives apart from the parent. None of these addresses a reasoned, voluntary process through which the youth may seek an emancipated status. The current legal provisions for emancipation offer little guidance to those seeking to ensure the legal status and rights of homeless youth.

I. Insufficient Employment Opportunities

Employment issues are of great concern to a significant portion of youth, and homeless youth face many of the obstacles to meaningful employment that are experienced by other high-risk youth. Many are ill-prepared for work and are often in need of intensive preparation even before being able to enter employment training programs. However, once a youth is identified as homeless, the employment and training community is often reluctant to provide services. Further, if the youth is perceived as having no community ties, community resources are often not made available for job training and related services.

Unsuccessful employment experiences may jeopardize AFDC or Home Relief funding because local social services districts impose sanctions on individuals who leave gainful employment to receive public assistance. Individuals who are sanctioned are ineligible to receive public assistance for a period of 75 days. There is no guidance from New York State DSS to aid local districts in making the determination as to when a person should be sanctioned. As a result, many youth on public assistance do not seek employment because employment means risking having no source of support if they should lose their job.

Current employment and training programs primarily funded through JTPA are of limited use for homeless youth because the performance standards that the SDA's are required to meet are so high that they act as a disincentive to providing services for high-risk youth. Further, the extensive supportive

service needs of a homeless youth in a training program cannot be met through the JTPA program. Legislation mandates that only 30 percent of the funds to an SDA can be used for both administration and supportive services. In addition, the cost of employment programs is higher for serving youth with multiple problems than it is for serving the general population. As a result, there is little incentive for service providers to develop employment and training programs that are appropriate to the needs of homeless youth.

J. Inaccessibility of Educational Services

State law entitles children between 5 and 21 years of age to a free and appropriate education. Homeless and runaway youth, as well as other youth who are living in temporary shelters or who have made long-term or permanent arrangements to live on their own, have experienced numerous problems in continuing their education.

School officials are reluctant to allow these youth to attend classes, and in some cases, youth have been denied services. This has occurred because school officials presume that a youth's residence is that of his/her parents. As a result, when children are unable or unwilling to live with their parents, the school districts where such youth are living often deny educational services, usually basing this denial on questions concerning legal and fiscal responsibility for tuition reimbursement. Therefore, the disruption caused in the life of a youth who has either voluntarily or involuntarily left his/her home due to personal or family crises is further exacerbated by a disruption in his or her education.

Summary

The current service system for homeless youth focuses on the needs that a homeless youth presents during the initial crisis stage. This section has identified some of the gaps and barriers that youth, service providers, and advocates have experienced in attempting to refocus a crisis-oriented system toward encouraging long-term self-sufficiency.

SECTION IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The recommendations that follow are proposed as a strategy for improving the state and local response to the problems and needs of homeless youth. These recommendations recognize the special characteristics of young people who are homeless, as distinguished from the general homeless population. The recommendations focus primarily on making those service systems which assist adolescents and young adults more responsive to the needs of homeless youth.

It is essential to note that many of the problems experienced by homeless youth are rooted in more pervasive social problems such as poverty, structural unemployment, and declining housing stock. It is beyond the scope of this report, however, to make specific recommendations to ameliorate these problems. Accordingly, the recommendations presented below must be viewed as part of a broader strategy for addressing the causes and consequences of homelessness in New York State.

Homeless youth are a heterogeneous population possessing a wide variety of service needs. That is, they find themselves homeless for different reasons and have differing levels of skills to cope with the homeless episode and to establish a more stable living arrangement. For some of these youth, their problems are complicated by other circumstances such as pregnancy or parenthood, drug dependency, or serious psychological problems. Communities are equally diverse in the resources available to meet the needs of the homeless.

The goal of the Steering Committee in developing these recommendations was to ensure that communities have available a continuum of services capable of meeting the needs of a given homeless youth regardless of the youth's current preparedness for self-sufficiency.

The Steering Committee has identified three necessary components to a continuum of services for homeless youth. They are:

1) Crisis Intervention Services deal with primary needs and screen for additional service needs. These services are the initial point of contact for all runaway and homeless youth requiring care. Crisis intervention services meet basic needs including food, emotional support, and safe shelter/housing. For many youth, reunification with the family is possible and interventions are directed accordingly. For other youth, for whom reunification is neither possible nor appropriate, assistance in obtaining additional services is provided.

2) Transitional Living Services are designed to aid youth making the transition to independent living. Many youth who are unable to resolve problems with their families need services that will help them become independent. For homeless youth with more serious problems and skill deficits, residential and nonresidential services may need to be provided for as long as a one-year period. The longer time frame in

these programs allows for more extensive employment, training, and supportive services. In all transitional services, increasing self-responsibility is built into day-to-day living.

3) Support Services for Independent Living include such services as case management, counseling, and support to youth living independently. These services are necessary to aid the youth in maintaining employment or vocational training, remaining committed to education, developing a positive social support system, and coping with new experiences and stresses which come with independent living. While these services are required by most youth during the initial period of living on their own, some may also have long-term needs for these services on an intermittent basis. Support services should be available to these youth on an as needed basis.

The Steering Committee has developed five major recommendations around which future actions should be organized. The recommendations address the following five areas:

- the necessity of coordination between state agencies in order to maximize existing resources;
- the implementation of a formal mechanism to ensure coordinated planning and service delivery at the local level;
- the development of transitional services for homeless youth;
- the necessity of better equipping youth in residential child care with the skills necessary to live independently; and,
- the importance of evaluation and research in the development and improvement of the service delivery systems.

These five recommendations form a framework for the organization of more specific implementation activities that follow each recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

NEW YORK STATE SHOULD MAXIMIZE THE USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES ACROSS STATE AGENCIES TO MORE EFFECTIVELY SERVE HOMELESS YOUTH.

As with any population, it is essential to deal with the whole person and not just the crisis which caused him or her to be identified as a client. Typically, the homeless youth needs multiple services if he or she can realistically be expected to move toward a stable life style. Among the services necessary are housing, educational/vocational training, health care, legal services, mental health services, and substance and alcohol abuse services.

It is clear that the needs of homeless youth are broad and cross the jurisdictions of a number of state agencies. The needs of homeless youth should be addressed by a comprehensive state policy. Such a policy would provide direction to individual agencies for ongoing policy development and

decision making. New York State should take a number of specific steps to ensure the coordination of resources necessary to serve homeless youth.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

A. New York State should create a structure for the development of an integrated policy for homeless youth through an expansion of the membership and charge of the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council, established to provide policy direction for the Division for Youth in the implementation of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, should be given the broader mandate to ensure the ongoing coordination of state level policy relating to homeless youth. The present membership of providers, advocates, youth bureaus, and state agency representatives from the Division for Youth, Council on Children and Families, and Department of Social Services should be expanded to include the Department of Health, Division of Housing and Community Renewal, Division of Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse, Department of Labor, Division of Substance Abuse Services, Office of Mental Health, and the State Education Department. This would broaden the focus of the Advisory Council to include the perspective of other relevant service sectors.

B. The Council on Children and Families should facilitate an interagency work team to support implementation activities to improve services for homeless youth.

While this report provides a solid framework for necessary cross-agency activities on behalf of homeless youth, more detailed implementation activities must be developed and carried out by an interagency team. Additionally, this team would provide ongoing staff support and assistance to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council.

C. The New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council, in collaboration with state agencies and existing providers, should provide technical assistance to improve the effectiveness of homeless youth programs, paying particular attention to the needs of special populations.

Too often, communities develop programs in isolation and without the benefit of the knowledge and experience of others in the field. As a result, many programs encounter problems which may have been avoided or easily resolved if someone were available to provide guidance and direction. Also, concerns have been raised by advocates for some special populations that homeless youth services may not be adequately sensitive to issues surrounding certain special populations. For example, adolescent mothers and their young children are a significant part of the homeless youth population and present a number of unique service needs. Special attention must be paid to the development of residential programs designed to provide young mothers with the skills necessary to move towards self-sufficiency while providing interim secure living arrangements for the family unit. Further, disabled youth, sexually exploited youth, gay and lesbian youth, and recent refugees are among the homeless youth for whom program staff may need specific training and sensitization.

If expanded as recommended in this report, the Advisory Council would have the breadth of expertise necessary to meet the technical assistance needs of local providers. Using staff from existing homeless youth programs and state agencies, and in cooperation with youth advocacy groups, the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council should develop the capacity to provide technical assistance and should encourage the transfer of knowledge between programs. The Advisory Council should work with advocates and providers with expertise in serving these and other special populations to develop a resource manual and to identify other mechanisms to meet the unique needs of these youth. Also, the Advisory Council should explore program models which are particularly responsive to such specific populations.

D. The Division for Youth should collaborate with the appropriate state agencies, existing providers, and advocacy groups to prepare a technical assistance guide for local service development which defines the necessary components of a service continuum for homeless youth.

Communities seeking to develop services for homeless youth may become overwhelmed by the broad range of service needs. For many communities, a significant barrier is the lack of guidance on what constitutes an effective continuum of services and what program models exist with potential for replication. A technical assistance guide for communities should include descriptions of specific program models that, together, form a continuum of essential services. This should encompass crisis intervention services, transitional living services and support for independent living.

E. The Governor's Plan for Special Populations and Coordination under the Job Training Partnership Act should identify homeless youth within the definition of "hard to serve".

Vocational training and subsequent employment are essential for a youth to become self-sufficient. The federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is the primary public program for local employment and training activities. As part of New York State's implementation of JTPA, the Governor has identified special populations who are particularly disadvantaged in the job market and who have traditionally been underserved by employment-related programs. The State Education Department administers one part of the JTPA program, consisting of eight percent of the state's allocation. The Act stipulates that services funded through these monies may include services for offenders and other individuals whom the Governor determines require special assistance. It is recommended that homeless youth be so designated.

The Governor's Plan also describes incentives available through discretionary funds for actively encouraging the involvement of hard-to-serve populations. These funds represent six percent of the state's JTPA allocations to the service delivery areas. The inclusion of homeless youth in the plan would encourage local communities to design effective outreach and training strategies for the unique needs of this population. It would also encourage linkages between those programs currently serving the homeless and employment and training services.

F. The Department of Social Services should issue an administrative letter providing guidance to local districts in applying the 75-day work sanction rule under the Home Relief program in the case of homeless youth who are attempting to maintain employment.

Many service providers have cited the 75-day work sanction rule as a problem with using the Home Relief program for homeless youth. The work sanction rule restricts a person from receiving benefits within 75 days of becoming unemployed if the local social services district rules that the person willingly interrupted employment in order to receive public assistance. Many districts, without more specific guidelines for differentiating abuse of the system from cases needing additional support or training, will, with few exceptions, apply a sanction. As a result, many youth do not seek employment because employment means giving up benefits and risking no source of support for a 75-day period if they lose their job. Considering their limited job readiness and work experience, many youth are especially vulnerable to initial employment failures. Therefore, local social services districts should be provided technical assistance in applying the sanction rules. This action would minimize this disincentive to employment experience for homeless youth.

G. The State Education Law should be amended to ensure access to educational services for youth in temporary living situations.

Youth between five and twenty-one years of age and without a high school diploma are entitled to a free and appropriate education. However, a youth who is unwilling or unable to live with his/her parents is often denied access to educational services because questions arise over which school district is responsible for the cost. A large number of children and adolescents are denied educational services due to the lack of a clear understanding of school district responsibility.

Legislation should be enacted to clarify school district responsibility when school-age children are temporarily relocated in emergency shelters outside their usual school district. Additionally, the legislation should provide a procedure for local review and appeal of the denial of an application for admission to a public school.

H. The New York State Office of Mental Health should develop models for the provision of mental health services for homeless youth and collaborate with the Division for Youth in establishing model coordination agreements between homeless youth programs and local mental health departments.

Section I of this report highlights the significant mental health needs of the homeless population. In addition, the disorientation and disruption caused by the homeless episode increase the likelihood of psychological problems. Therefore, the initial stabilization efforts of any homeless youth program must include the provision of strong mental health supports.

In order to provide mental health services, programs need to identify the mental health needs of individual homeless youth and provide appropriate psychiatric and other mental health services. The mobile mental health team model should be examined as a possible approach to providing assessment services, particularly in urban areas with multiple programs for the homeless.

Beyond initial assessment services, programs must be able to provide an adequate level of ongoing counseling and mental health services. Shared staffing, either through local mental health department contracts or arranged through joint funding by providers, is a promising approach that should also be explored as a cost-effective model for the provision of mental health services.

I. The Department of Health and the Division for Youth should collaborate on the development of model service agreements between homeless youth programs and health care providers.

The health care needs of homeless youth often go unnoticed due to the urgency of responding to the immediate crises the youth presents (e.g., shelter, mental health needs) when making contact with a program. Unfortunately, many homeless youth are experiencing health problems that require prompt attention. The Division for Youth and the Department of Health should develop model service agreements for the provision of health care for homeless youth. These agreements should include procedures for clients of homeless youth programs to obtain access to necessary health services including thorough physical examinations.

J. The Department of Social Services and the Division for Youth should collaborate on the development of service agreements and protocols to increase the access of homeless youth to the Medicaid program.

The Medicaid program is a federally funded program to subsidize health care and health-related costs for the poor. Due to the economic status of most homeless youth, this program offers an important resource in meeting the health care needs of these youth. In fact, making this program more accessible to homeless youth will not result in a major expansion of the Medicaid population, as many of these youth have had a prior involvement with the Medicaid program either as a foster child or as part of their natural family. Considering the pressing needs of many of these youth to receive prompt medical care, local social services districts and the local runaway and homeless youth coordinator should develop protocols to expedite the referral and determination process. Models for such protocols should be provided by the Department of Social Services and the Division for Youth.

Some providers have also been concerned that local social services districts have routinely enrolled youth in income maintenance, food stamps and medicaid programs when the referral agency had recommended that only medicaid services were necessary. Therefore, the agreements should also indicate that the local social services district will perform individual eligibility determinations for various public assistance programs and provide only those services that the youth actually needs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

NEW YORK STATE SHOULD ENSURE THAT LOCAL COMMUNITIES HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP A COORDINATED RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH.

The success of local efforts to serve homeless youth in a comprehensive manner will rest on the state's ability to provide consistent guidance and mechanisms for local action. In some areas, more than one agency may be addressing the needs of the population. However, to best serve homeless youth, program development, funding, implementation, and service delivery must be coordinated. Therefore, New York State must provide guidance to local communities in linking existing programs in order to expand the accessibility of services.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

A. County runaway and homeless youth plans should be designated as the basis for the planning and coordination of local services for homeless youth.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Planning Guidelines, issued by the Division for Youth, and currently used by county youth bureaus receiving Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funding, provide an appropriate mechanism for coordinating with other local planning processes (e.g., mental health, social services, and employment and training). They also provide guidance in the identification of how all pertinent resources will be used to form a community strategy. The plan should document the coordination, service referral agreements and referral procedures among all service providers which are part of the community's network for serving homeless youth. Additional funding and program development for services for homeless youth should be implemented through these planning requirements.

B. The Department of Social Services, Office of Mental Health, Department of Health, and Department of Labor should provide direction to their local counterparts to ensure coordinated efforts in the planning and development of runaway and homeless youth services.

While the locus for planning programs and services for homeless youth should be the Runaway and Homeless Youth plan, coordination by the youth bureau and the integration of other local plans and resources is essential to successful program development. Each appropriate state agency should direct its local counterparts to become actively involved in this planning process and should support their involvement by providing information and technical assistance. State agency field staff should be fully utilized in this endeavor.

C. The Division for Youth should expand the mandated responsibilities of the County Runaway and Homeless Youth Coordinator to include ensuring that a locus for coordinated case planning and management exists for homeless youth.

Many homeless youth lack the ability to articulate requests for specific services. Therefore, they have a limited ability to identify and access the multiple community agencies which together could form an effective support

system. Consequently, it is recommended that local program development include case planning and management services. Case managers should develop a comprehensive service plan for each youth based on the individual needs of the young person, identify appropriate resources, and ensure that services are provided. These services would include shelter, health care, mental health services, employment and training and any other service deemed necessary.

Each county receiving RHYA funds is required to designate a person or agency as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Coordinator. The Coordinator is responsible for the development of the comprehensive plan and necessary coordination agreements for serving the population. On a case-specific basis, it is the Coordinator who is responsible for ensuring access to services and 24-hour intake and service availability. Therefore, the Coordinator is uniquely situated to provide or ensure ongoing case management. Barnabas in Onondaga County and the Post-Institution Project in Nassau County both provide case management models for replication in other communities.

D. The licensing of all runaway and homeless youth programs should be consolidated under the responsibility of the Division for Youth.

The Division for Youth maintains licensing responsibility for runaway and homeless youth programs funded through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. With the development of Young Adult Shelters, the Department of Social Services now has a parallel licensing role for programs developed under Young Adult Shelter Regulations. Having two agencies involved in program licensing may cause duplication of state agency efforts, as well as confusion for providers. Consolidating the licensing of all runaway and homeless youth programs would create an integrated set of standards governing program operations.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THE MAJOR EMPHASIS IN PROGRAM EXPANSION SHOULD BE THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSITIONAL SERVICES TO AID OLDER HOMELESS YOUTH IN DEVELOPING INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS.

The major gap in services for the homeless youth population is in the area of transitional services. Transitional services provide youth with the opportunity to develop employment, social, and life management skills so the youth may eventually become self-sufficient. Transitional services become critical after the initial crisis is over. Once a youth's basic needs are stabilized, he/she may effectively utilize other services. Therefore, a residential program with maximum opportunities for the client to assume increasing self-responsibility is necessary.

Among the factors which differentiate these needed services from existing service programs for runaway and homeless youth is the current focus on serving younger adolescents. It is increasingly evident that this focus must be expanded to address program development and service access for older homeless youth (i.e., the 16-21 year old age group), with a special emphasis on services to aid in the transition to independent living.

Despite the increasing attention being paid to homeless youth, program development has not increased dramatically. At present, there is no funding stream available that is dedicated to the provision of transitional and independent living services. Where they exist, these services are only being provided under very special circumstances where program providers have been able to link various resources in a piecemeal fashion. The creation of a dedicated funding stream is important for the expansion of transitional services.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

A. Residential programs based on the models outlined in the DSS Young Adult Shelter Regulations should be expanded.

The greatest proportion of residential programs available to homeless youth are emergency shelters providing crisis housing. While emergency shelters are an essential component of the service network, they are not designed to meet the transitional living needs of homeless youth for whom return to the family is not feasible.

In 1982, DSS promulgated the Young Adult Shelter Regulations which attempt to reflect a type of programming appropriate for transitional living models and should be used as a standard for program development. The focus of these programs can be shifted away from a crisis orientation. This allows the program to provide daily counseling and emphasize employment skills training, as well as teaching the skills necessary for independent living such as saving and budgeting. Educational and recreational services are also available.

Two major categories of transitional residential care need to be developed. First, program development is needed in short-term residences where clients may stay for up to six months. As this is still a relatively short period of time, constant attention in these programs must be paid to preparing the youth for discharge. Second, there must be an expansion of long-term residences where residents stay for three months to a year. Like the short-term residences, these programs should also be developed in compliance with the Young Adult Shelter Regulations. The focus of these programs should be on long-term advancement in employment and education. While this will require the provision of supportive counseling, 24-hour coverage may not be needed. Current providers of this service type stress the importance of residents contributing to the cost of the program.

B. New state funds should be appropriated on an annual basis to support transitional and independent living program models for homeless youth. This should be accomplished through a new section under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.

The most critical need for funding is for the development of transitional services for homeless youth seeking independent living. It is the consensus of service providers that much of the shortage in crisis shelters is directly caused by the lack of more appropriate residential and nonresidential transitional programs. Homeless youth are often caught in a revolving door as they move from crisis shelter, to the street, and back again. Additionally, these funds would support much needed nonresidential services such as case management and independent living programs.

Based on an initial analysis of program costs and anticipated need, it is estimated that approximately $2.5 million of new state funds are needed on an annualized basis to support the development of transitional and independent living programs. These monies should be appropriated through the same funding formula as RHYA funds.

Placing the funds for the development of these services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act ensures a mechanism for community planning and coordination as a prerequisite for receiving a grant. Segregating these funds under a separate article of the Act ensures a specific level of funding for new services for homeless youth while maintaining existing funding for crisis services and other runaway services. An additional benefit of this dedicated funding stream is that it will increase accessibility of transitional living shelters to HHAP funds available through DSS. The primary barrier to obtaining these funds has been the inability of many of these programs to document a consistent program funding source.

The program development allowed by these new monies will have a significant impact on New York State's ability to serve homeless youth. The strong emphasis on coordination will increase other state and local dollars and other program resources targeted on this population. It is essential to note that these new funds will not ameliorate all homelessness or its causes. Rather, this focused effort should provide a framework for addressing those systemic problems that contribute to the incidence and persistence of the homeless youth problem.

C. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act should be amended to increase allowable lengths of stay in programs designed for transition to independent living.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act provides the basis for a comprehensive service approach to runaway and homeless youth. When drafted in 1978, the bill focused on the crisis intervention and emergency shelter needs of a population for which family reunification would be the primary resolution. Programs are now serving an increasingly older population who have fewer opportunities for family reunification. The current maximum length of stay permitted under the Act is 30 days, with the possibility of an additional 30-day extension. While effective for crisis intervention and family reunification, the 30-day time frame is not sufficient for transitional living services. The RHYA should be amended to increase allowable lengths of stay for youth in programs designed for transition to independent living.

D. The definition of homeless youth in the Runaway and Homeless Act should be amended to include youth up to the age of 21.

Under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, the current age definition for both runaway and homeless youth ends at age 18. To allow for service accessibility for the older homeless youth, the age limit must be raised. The most reasonable and cost-effective way to increase service accessibility is to expand the current system, rather than create a parallel mechanism. This strategy would maintain a coordinated locus for runaway and homeless youth services, as well as allow flexibility to communities to maximize resources that may be necessary for runaway and homeless youth regardless of age.

Coupled with the preceding implementation step, this amendment would allow the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to support a coordinated service system with the capability of meeting the transitional living needs of older homeless youth.

E. The Department of Social Services should provide technical assistance and written guidance to local social services districts for the use of Home Relief funds for independent living programs.

The Home Relief (HR) program is designed to be an income maintenance program. As such, there are severe limitations to its use as a source of funds for a residential program with an intensive service component. However, HR can support room and board costs for an individual in supervised independent living programs where less intensive services are provided on site. Innovative models such as congregate apartment settings with a counselor assigned for supportive counseling could use HR funds for room and board and use other funds, such as SDPP, for supportive services. Therefore, DSS should issue a technical assistance memorandum instructing local social services districts on appropriate uses of HR in homeless youth program development.

F. Statutory procedures for the emancipation of mature minors should be established.

In New York State, there are no consistent guidelines for determining or granting emancipation of a minor. The lack of a legal status for those youth who are "de facto" emancipated, particularly those 16 to 18 years old, increases barriers to the establishment of a permanent residence, educational plans, and other arrangements for personal health and well-being (e.g., medical care, leases, credit). For many youth, initial success in independent living is undermined by the inability under current law to take responsibility for day-to-day activities such as signing a lease or seeking non-emergency health care.

A formal emancipation procedure, petitioned through the family court, should be established. This would allow the family court to make a finding based on the young person's documentation of a feasible plan for independent living. The experience of other states supports the development of a mechanism that allows for either partial or complete emancipation. Under complete emancipation, the youth would have both the rights and responsibilities of those of the age of majority. Through a partial emancipation decree, the court could specify what individual rights of majority could be accorded. For example, the youth could be given the ability to consent to medical care but not the ability to enter a binding financial contract.

RECOMMENDATION 4

NEW YORK STATE SHOULD ENSURE THAT YOUTH LEAVING RESIDENTIAL CARE HAVE SUFFICIENT SKILLS TO BECOME REINTEGRATED INTO COMMUNITY SETTINGS.

As noted in Section I, recent surveys of homeless youth seeking shelter document a disproportionate number of youth with a history of foster care or other residential placement. This suggests weaknesses in discharge planning and current practices regarding aftercare services. The improvement of such services would be a major preventive measure for the homeless youth population.

Essential to addressing the needs of youth leaving residential care is ensuring that program models reflect the discharge goals of the youth in care. The increasing number of youth leaving care to enter independent living require innovative program models designed to support the establishment of a self-sufficient life style. Among the models that must be explored are those that encourage the youth to establish natural support systems within the community.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

A. The Department of Social Services, Division for Youth, Office of Mental Health, and State Education Department should collaborate on the development of effective standards for discharge planning.

Effective transition from residential care to community-based living requires discharge planning to start long before the youth leaves care. DSS, DFY, OMH, and SED need to develop statewide standards for discharge planning to ensure that youth leaving care have appropriate living situations (either with their family, guardian, or independently) and the appropriate supports to make a successful transition to community life.

B. The Council on Children and Families should facilitate efforts among the Department of Social Services, Division for Youth, Office of Mental Health, and State Education Department to develop a coordinated response to the aftercare needs of youth returning to the community from residential care.

The Council on Children and Families is currently involved in an interagency effort to improve discharge planning and the delivery of aftercare services. The methodology involves the analysis of pertinent regulations, procedures, policies, and models. This project should form the basis of a systematic approach for ensuring effective linkages between the residential program and the appropriate resources in the community to which the youth will return.

C. Emphasis in aftercare model development should be placed on those models that focus on the development and strengthening of natural support systems.

Many youth leaving residential care have spent significant periods of their lives with human service professionals as their primary source of guidance, support and companionship. Models of aftercare services that

continue the central role of the professional reinforce the youth's client role and dependence on the formal care system. Those models which consistently encourage the youth to seek out and establish linkages with natural community supports such as family members, community organizations, recreation programs, and religious congregations will more successfully enhance youth skills leading to independence and self-sufficiency.

RECOMMENDATION 5

NEW YORK STATE SHOULD ENSURE THE INTEGRATION OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION INTO ALL INITIATIVES TARGETED TOWARD HOMELESS YOUTH.

The lack of adequate data limits the ability of state agencies to determine the characteristics and needs of the homeless youth population and to design appropriate services. Research and evaluation efforts that collect and analyze data on this population, as well as on programs serving this population, are necessary to improve the effectiveness of intervention and prevention strategies. It is important that future policy and funding decisions be based on the results of pertinent research and evaluation.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

A. The Division for Youth should establish a client-based data collection system that would provide accurate profiles of the characteristics and service needs of the homeless youth population.

The Division for Youth's current data collection requirements for programs funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act are limited to aggregate program data such as the numbers of youth sheltered and the numbers of youth receiving crisis intervention services. Individual client data forms should be designed by the Division for Youth after consultation with the Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Council. Runaway and Homeless Youth Act funded programs would be required to complete these forms on every youth seeking services. Additionally, programs supported by other funds should be encouraged to contribute to this data base.

Because the purpose of this data collection system would be to facilitate program planning rather than client tracking, all personally identifying information would be retained by the programs. This would protect the confidentiality rights of the youth and their families.

B. Program models should be evaluated to determine the most effective ways to serve the multiple needs of this population.

Program evaluations should be conducted to aid program planners, service providers, and funding organizations in developing the most effective programs. The results of evaluations should be taken into account when developing funding and program development criteria for the future. To ensure the consistent evaluation of the service delivery system, a specific amount of monies within the appropriation for homeless youth services should be earmarked for this purpose.

C. New York State should seek private sector and federal government funds to support research on the problems and needs of the homeless youth population.

Research needs to be conducted to provide direction for the planning and development of prevention and treatment strategies. The approaches set forth in this document have strong national implications. Therefore, efforts should be made to attract federal and private sector support for these research activities. Such research should reflect a joint effort of government, service providers, advocacy groups, and the academic community. Particular focus should be placed on the following areas:

1) Investigation of the relationship between adult homelessness and adolescent runaway and homeless experiences. Many people involved in the provision of services to the homeless are concerned that runaway and homeless youth will become homeless adults. Understanding the degree to which this relationship exists is important in the development of effective treatment approaches.

2) Development of a profile of homeless youth and their families. At present little is known about the families of runaway and homeless youth. Many families are dysfunctional, yet only a relatively small percentage of youth run away. Research on the characteristics of the families of runaway and homeless youth could provide information needed to develop prevention strategies.

3) Analysis of the characteristics of homeless youths who successfully make the transition to independent living. Despite the limitations of the service delivery system, a percentage of homeless youth do succeed in developing stable life styles. Research on the personal characteristics of such youth and an identification of what program and community supports were crucial to that transition would provide insights for both individual case planning and community program development.

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